

April 2, 1970

FROM: Ambassador Bunker, Saigon 831

TO: The White House, exclusively eyes only, Dr. Kissinger

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

1. I have re-read your WHS-0010 reporting on your March 16 meeting with Michael, Yul, and Nestor and the memorandum of conversation which came by courier. I believe that there has been some progress, but I agree with your statement that their basic purpose is not yet clear, and may only begin to emerge over the next few meetings. It seems to me they are still in a probing posture and as you mention have kept open all options of seeking settlement or only reconnoitering our position.

2. On our side you have spoken candidly on the military aspect of a settlement, made an explicit proposal for withdrawal of all US and allied forces and made clear to them while there may be a different legal basis their forces must also be withdrawn. You have also stated our position that a solution must reflect the balance of political forces.

3. On their side, they have essentially dropped the 10 points by condensing them into two main issues as "military problems" and "political problems"; have moved away from their hackneyed formula of "withdrawal of US forces" and "formation of a coalition government". In this connection, they seem to have muted their demand for a change in the GVN. They seem to be more flexible than they have been in the past and obviously want to keep the channel open. I think this became clear when you went back at them pretty hard toward the conclusion of your last meeting.

4. I have a feeling that what they are most anxious to do now is to get some feeling of our views for a political settlement. We are in a somewhat delicate position here since we have always said that the GVN must participate in negotiations affecting the internal problems of South Vietnam. On the other hand, we told the other side that we are ready to discuss anything with them and, of course, we would have to keep Thieu informed of our discussion of political matters with Michael, Yul, and Nestor. With this caveat, I see no reason why we should not discuss matters relating to a political settlement.

5. For example, following up your statement that a solution must reflect the balance of political forces, you might develop this further with ideas of how such a balance might be achieved through the establishment

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of a mixed electoral commission with adequate powers and with international supervision of elections. They have spoken of coalition government with three elements and the problem is to find some middle ground. Although they have not said so, it seems to me implicit in their approach and their reactions to what you have said that they also realize this is necessary. It will be interesting to see what they might have in mind in this connection. I do not believe we have gotten to the point yet, but I have always felt that if and when we can get the two Vietnamese sides talking together there is a strong likelihood that they will come up with a typically Vietnamese settlement which includes some kind of accommodation not now clear to us. But I think we are still too early in the exploratory stage to put this forward now.

6. Finally, it will be interesting to see what effect the developments in Cambodia which have taken place since your last meeting may have on the other side's attitude. It seems to me that with a prospect of a three front war on their hands, their position might become somewhat more flexible.

7. I realize these observations are not especially helpful. I think there is need to get them to be more explicit on their position. You have been explicit on the military problem. I note that Michael's last statement was "we will speak on our position" -- presumably at the next meeting.